

La Comédiathèque



BOULEVARD

Jean-Pierre Martinez

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Dead End Boulevard

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Robert and Caroline Blanc would love to marry their daughter Victoria off to Stanislas de Coursensac, the mayor's son, who's on the verge of being re-elected. But this boulevard comedy seems to have no way out...

Characters:

Robert Blanc

Caroline Blanc

Victoria Blanc

Alexandra (or Alexandre) de Coursensac

Stanislas de Coursensac

Inspector (or Inspectress) Sanchez

Possible Cast Combinations

4M/2F

3M/3F

2M/4F

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In a small provincial town, the living room of a bourgeois house. Victoria, a young woman in her twenties, enters in her pyjamas. She collapses onto the sofa and switches on the TV with the remote control. She flips through several channels before landing on a news one reporting on rising sea levels caused by climate change. Caroline, her mother, enters with a horrified expression.

Caroline – It's a disaster!

Victoria mutes the TV.

Victoria – What? Climate change?

Caroline – For now, it's in our toilet that the waters are rising! It's overflowing into the hallway. Haven't you noticed?

Victoria – No...

Caroline – At this rate, we'll need a gondola to get around the house!

Victoria – That'll remind you of your honeymoon.

Caroline – Yes... Your father took me to a little hotel in Normandy. And there was already a leak in the tap.

Victoria – Speaking of leaks, where is Dad?

Caroline – He's locked in his office with his urologist. You know when he's locked in his office with his urologist, we're not supposed to disturb him.

Victoria – But I thought you went to Venice on your honeymoon...

Caroline – That's what your father says. According to him, I also got married in white at the church.

Victoria – That's not true?

Caroline – The truth, my dear, is that your father got mummy pregnant, and after that... Oh, never mind. I'll have to do it myself...

Victoria – Fix the leak?

Caroline – Call the plumber!

Caroline exits.

Victoria *(to the audience with a tender expression)* – The first thing that comes to mind when I think of my parents is... *(abandoning her smile)* how can anyone be so thick?

She unmutes the TV. A mobile phone rings. She mutes the TV again and answers.

Victoria – Secretariat of the Leftist National Front, how can I help?... Oh, Sabrina, it's you. Yes, yes, don't worry, I've printed the flyers... OK, the leaflets, if you prefer. Any news from Karim? He's still our top candidate for the local elections. I've left him several messages, but... *(Her face freezes)* No... No, that can't be true... Him too? How did it happen? That's awful...

Caroline returns.

Caroline – All sorted. I've called, and they're sending someone within the hour.

Victoria – Sorry, Sabrina, I'll call you back.

Victoria puts her phone away.

Caroline – What's wrong? You look upset.

Victoria – It was Sabrina. My boyfriend Karim died last night in a car accident.

Caroline – You scared me. I thought it was something serious—like you being pregnant again!

Victoria – He wasn't just my boyfriend, Mum. He was my best friend.

Caroline – I always thought he wasn't the right boy for you.

Victoria – Why's that?

Caroline – For starters... he was shorter than you! Can you imagine? A whole life without being able to wear heels!

Victoria – Right... And more importantly, his father was a dustman.

Caroline – And not exactly Catholic, if you ask me... You should get ready, shouldn't you?

Victoria – For what?

Caroline – To receive the mayor's son!

Victoria – Sorry, I forgot. I'm really not in the mood for this right now.

Caroline – Well, now that you don't have a boyfriend anymore, you're free as a bird!

Victoria – Stanislas de Coursensac? What's he doing here? I barely even know him.

Caroline – You were in school together for years, don't you remember?

Victoria – Oh, yes.

Caroline – I wouldn't recognise him if I passed him in the street. He's just come back from San Francisco. He was studying there.

Victoria – Oh, right. I guess he's changed.

Caroline – He doesn't know anyone here anymore. I thought... Well, he's from a very good family, you know. De Coursensac. That means something in Trouville-la-Rivière.

Victoria – Oh, really? What does it mean?

Caroline – More than anyone like Ben Ali or Dos Santos, at least. He'll be here any moment. You're not meeting him dressed like that!

Victoria – Fine, Mum, I'll go get changed.

Victoria exits. Caroline sighs.

Caroline (*to the audience*) – Children... You know what they're like. Thank goodness we're here to look after their future... Karim... If I hadn't tampered with that little thug's brakes myself before he could get my daughter pregnant... (*Confiding*) Believe me, eliminating unwanted suitors is still the most effective contraception. And, thankfully, this one isn't even forbidden by the Church.

Robert enters, buttoning up his trousers.

Robert – Hello, my dear.

Caroline – Oh, Robert! I called someone about that leak.

Robert – That's kind, but it wasn't necessary. My urologist just examined me.

Caroline – I was talking about the toilet leak.

Robert – Oh, right...

Caroline – Are you absolutely sure she's a urologist?

Robert – Why do you ask?

Caroline – Female urologists aren't very common. And she looks more like an Asian massage girl, doesn't she?

Robert – She's also trained in Chinese medicine.

Caroline – That explains why she walks around in a kimono... Well, anyway, I've called.

Robert – Called who?

Caroline – The plumber!

Robert – Of course...

Caroline's mobile phone rings.

Caroline (*answering the phone*) – I hope it's not him cancelling. Hello! Madame de Coursensac, what a pleasure to hear from you. Oh, please, it's a delight. Stanislas? Yes, of course, we're expecting him any moment now. But do come for tea! That is, if you're not too busy with the election campaign. Very well. Let's say for coffee, then. See you soon, Madame de Coursensac. Alright. See you soon, Alexandra... (*hanging up*) That was Madame de Coursensac—well, Alexandra, as she insists I call her. She's coming for coffee

Robert – Excellent idea, Caroline. In a small town like ours, it's always smart to stay on good terms with the mayor. Is Victoria awake? I know it's the holidays, but still. As my mother used to say, *the morning belongs to those who get up before noon!*

Caroline – I've sent her to get dressed. Young de Coursensac boy should be here shortly. I invited him to spend some time with Victoria.

Robert – Stanislas, that's right. How old is he again?

Caroline – About 25.

Robert – Ah, yes... I imagine he's changed a lot since school.

Caroline – I just hope the plumber gets here before Stanislas does.

Robert – Or let's hope young Stanislas doesn't need to use the toilet...

Caroline – You have to admit, they'd make a perfect match, wouldn't they?

Robert – The de Coursensacs mean something in Trouville-la-Rivière.

Caroline – He is the mayor's son, after all.

Robert – For now, anyway... We're in the middle of an election campaign.

Caroline – The de Coursensacs have been mayors of Trouville-la-Rivière since the French Revolution.

Robert – And the Blanc family have been making pipes since 1824.

Caroline – I don't see why that would ever change.

Robert – And why should it? The incumbent mayor's campaign message is as clear as it gets. Look at this.

He holds out an election flyer for her to read.

Caroline – “Vote for de Coursensac.” That's it?

Robert – Don't you find it convincing?

Caroline – “Vote for de Coursensac”... It does have a nice ring to it.

Robert – More than “Vote Blanc” at any rate. Which is why I decided not to run after all.

Caroline – And one day, Stanislas will take over his mother's seat at the town hall.

Robert – If our daughter marries him, she'll become the mayor's wife—just like that.”

Caroline – Do you know what the butcher told me the other day?

Robert – What?

Caroline – Apparently, since he came back from the United States, his son has become a vegetarian.

Robert – The butcher's son is a vegetarian?

Caroline – The mayor's son!

Robert – No!

Caroline – They call it vegan now, apparently.

Robert – Vegan... Sounds like a sect. Or an alien civilisation...

Caroline – He used to do theatre when he was little... His mother is very devout, you know. That must annoy her.

Robert – You mean the theatre?

Caroline – No, that he's vegan!

Robert – As long as he's not a terrorist. Or homosexual.

Caroline – Or both at once.

Robert – Can you even be both a terrorist and homosexual?

Caroline – I don't know; I've never thought about it. No, probably not.

Robert – What about a terrorist and vegetarian?

Suddenly, the sound of a jackhammer and heavy construction work cuts through the conversation.

Caroline – What on earth is that noise?

Robert – It's the construction for the new boulevard. I must've left a window open.

He steps out briefly.

Caroline – A boulevard? In Trouville-la-Rivière? Extraordinary!

The noise stops. Robert returns with a painting.

Robert – A boulevard, can you believe it? Here. In Trouville-la-Rivière!

Caroline – No one can call this a mere village anymore.

Robert – Exactly. Name one village you've ever heard of with a boulevard!

Caroline – And it's our mayor who initiated the project. It'll put her name in the history books, for sure.

Robert – Yes... Especially if the boulevard bears her name.

Caroline – A Boulevard de Coursensac?

Robert – Why else would they build it?

Caroline – Just imagine! If our daughter married a de Coursensac... She'd be called Victoria de Coursensac!

Robert – You're right...

Caroline – She could even have a boulevard named after her someday!

Robert – Our last chance to achieve immortality, Caroline. By marriage.

Caroline – Absolutely. A Boulevard Blanc isn't likely to happen anytime soon...

Robert – Hard to see why they'd name a boulevard after someone who spent their life making pipes.

Caroline – Unless he died a hero's death.

Robert – And yet, my poor mother won't see her granddaughter's wedding...

Caroline – Ah yes... God rest her soul...

Robert – Then again, we're not even sure she's dead. Her body was never found.

Caroline – After all this time... She'd lost her mind. She must have fallen into the river and drowned.

Robert – Still... People don't just vanish like that... And that river's not exactly big. They would have found her body.

Caroline – Or maybe she ran away...

Robert – Ran away? At 92?

Caroline – I don't know... Maybe she met someone...

Robert – None of this makes any sense... By the way, I've got something to show you.

He shows her the painting, a reproduction of Magritte's "The Treachery of Images" (a pipe with the caption "This is not a pipe").

Caroline – What's that?

Robert – *This is not a pipe.*

Caroline – It certainly looks like one...

Robert – Yes... It's unsettling, isn't it? I mean, it really makes you think.

Caroline – Think? About what?

He gazes at the painting thoughtfully, under the slightly worried watch of his wife.

Robert – About all sorts of things, Caroline! For example... Have you noticed? When you see something a second time, it makes less sense than the first?

Caroline – Less sense?

Robert – The third time even less than the second, and so on, until it doesn't make sense at all.

Caroline – Now that you mention it... I've seen you every day for over thirty years, and today you seem completely nonsensical.

Robert – You see, Caroline, I've spent my life making pipes... How many kilometres of pipes to get to this point? But have I really done anything meaningful?

Caroline – Well, a good pipe at the end of the day can be relaxing, don't you think?

Robert – I never thought I'd hear you say that, Caroline.

Caroline – I don't know... If you want to give your life meaning, make a donation to the Red Cross. At least it's tax-deductible.

Robert – I was thinking of something more radical. I want to leave a legacy, you understand?

Caroline – More radical? You're scaring me, Robert. You're not planning to blow yourself up, are you?

Robert – Blow myself up?

Caroline – Commit suicide, or some kind of madness like that!

Robert – To start with, I've decided to change my life. This doesn't make sense to me anymore, Caroline. I'm selling...

Caroline – You want to sell the family jewels? The French Pipe Company? The jewel of our regional heritage and the pride of our town?

Robert – I aspire to something else now, don't you see? As I approach the twilight of my miserable existence, I want to do something unforgettable. Something that will make the world remember my name – Robert Blanc – even after I'm gone.

Caroline – And what are you going to do?

Robert – I'm going to write my memoirs.

Caroline – Have you lost your mind?

Robert – I take it you're not in favour of this noble idea.

Caroline – In favour? I'd rather you blow yourself up instead...

Robert – As for selling the French Pipe Company, nothing's decided yet, don't worry...

Caroline – You can say that again? You'll have to walk over my dead body first, Robert!

Robert hesitates at this prospect.

Robert – And about this painting... Maybe we could hang it there, on the back wall? What do you think?

Caroline – On the back wall? Robert, are you serious? Alexandra de Coursensac is coming for coffee any minute now!

The doorbell rings.

Robert – It can't be her already.

Caroline – I'll get it. Hide that monstrosity immediately.

She exits. Robert looks again at the painting.

Robert (*to himself*) – The more you see things, the less they make sense... (*to the audience*) My wife, though—the more I see her, the more I want to kill her. I should have listened to my mother... Speaking of which, I can't help but wonder if Caroline had something to do with her disappearance.

He exits, taking the painting with him. Caroline returns with Stanislas. He's wearing overalls that look somewhat childish or feminine but could also pass as workwear to someone as inattentive as Caroline.

Caroline – Thank you for coming so quickly. Do come in. It's in the toilet.

Stan – In the toilet?

Caroline – Every time we flush, it's like Niagara Falls in there. But... you didn't bring your tools?

Stan – No... It's just that... I didn't realise you called me for...

Caroline – You don't seem very competent, young man. What are you—an apprentice? Part of some disability quota?

Stan – No...

Caroline – Don't tell me you're in rehabilitation? Just out of prison, is that it? Did you kill someone?

Stan – Not yet...

Caroline – Well, I don't have much of a choice. I'm expecting guests... You can at least take a look through the seat to see what's going on.

Stan – The seat?

Caroline – The toilet seat! What did they teach you in school, for heaven's sake?

Stan – I'm afraid I didn't major in plumbing at Stanford

Caroline (*distracted*) – My husband must have left a wrench somewhere. Come on, follow me.

Stan – I'm trying...

Caroline exits, followed by Stan. Victoria enters, now dressed, in a rather sexy outfit.

Victoria – I thought I heard the doorbell... I thought it was Stan... He just texted me asking for the address. Mum!

She exits. Stanislas returns, carrying a toolbox. He bumps into Robert, who enters.

Robert – Ah, you're here...

Stan – Yes, well...

Robert – Wait a minute—that's my toolbox!

Stan – Your wife gave it to me...

Robert – My mother always said: "A good workman always has his tools."

Stan – Yes, but...

Robert – So, the plumber? How's business these days?

Stan – My goodness... It's rather quiet.

Robert – Quiet? Except for those works outside the house. How’s a man supposed to write with all that racket?

Stan – What works?

Robert – For the new boulevard! Do you know where this boulevard is supposed to lead, by the way?

Stan – I have no idea.

Robert – It’s good for a little town like ours to have a real boulevard, but I wonder if that cow isn’t building it just so it’ll be named after her.

Stan – Madame Mayor wouldn’t dare...

Robert – Well, better to have your name on a street sign than on a war memorial, don’t you think?

Stan – Of course... Could you tell me where the toilet is? I believe your wife...

Robert – I want to leave my mark on the world too... But without the privilege of a fancy double-barrelled name... You see, I’m writing a book.

Stan – Really?

Robert – Would you like to read the first chapter?

Stan – Why not, but...

Robert – I mean, if a plumber likes it, it could be a popular success, right?

Stan – Yes, I guess... It depends on what it’s about.

Robert – Well, it’s... my reflections on the world today.

Stan – Oh, I see...

Robert – For example, my young friend, I’ve discovered a truth that few people realise.

Stan – I’d be curious to hear it...

Robert – Well, here it is. Politicians, left and right, always talk about the French People. The people want this, the people don’t want that. But what exactly is “the people”?

Stan – Yes... What is it?

Robert – My dear boy, the people don’t exist!

Stan – They don’t?

Robert – The people... it’s you, it’s me.

Stan – Of course...

Robert – The French People are just a bunch of idiots walking the streets—or driving on the roads.

Stan – Really?

Robert – It's obvious! Believe me, in my life, I've met plenty of people. I've seen lots of fools, but I've never met the French People. And that's the insight I want to share with my readers!

Stan – Yes, it's just that...

Robert – I'm at an age where I want to pass on what life has taught me to the younger generation. To share my experience, you understand?

Victoria enters and notices Stan.

Victoria – Stan? What are you doing with that toolbox?

Stan – I'm not entirely sure... Your mother...

Robert – Stan? You know this young man, Victoria?

Caroline enters.

Caroline – Stanislas, I'm terribly sorry... I mistook you for the plumber... It must have been the overalls. My daughter just told me...

Stan – No, it's fine. Should I take a look at the toilet anyway?

Caroline – Oh, absolutely not! Robert, for heaven's sake, put that toolbox away...

Robert – Right now... Just think about what I said, young man.

Robert exits with the toolbox.

Caroline – Sorry about the misunderstanding, really... Can I get you something to drink, Stanislas? Orange juice? Lemonade?

Stan – No, thank you.

Caroline – In that case, my dears... I'll let you two catch up. I'm sure you have plenty to talk about... after all this time.

Stan – Yes, it's been almost fifteen years, hasn't it?

Caroline – I'll leave you to it...

Caroline exits. An awkward silence follows.

Stan – Sorry... My mother insisted I come.

Victoria – The last time I saw you, you were wearing a dress.

Stan – Oh, really?

Victoria – It was at the school play. Romeo and Juliet. We were short on girls, so you played Juliet. Did you keep it up?

Stan – Well, no. My mum would have liked me in a cassock, but I ended up opting for overalls. Life is all about compromise...

Victoria – I meant the theatre.

Stan – Oh, no, I gave that up too. For now.

Victoria – And you went to do a master's in business in the US.

Stan – It made my mum happy... She was already so disappointed I didn't join the seminary. And you?

Victoria – I'm studying law. But really, I'm training for the national anti-capitalist and ecological revolution.

Stan – Oh, that's good too.

Caroline enters, carrying a tray with two glasses, a bottle, and a plate.

Caroline – Here you go, my dears, I've brought you some sausage. I mean... Since your friend just came back from the United States, I imagine it's been a while since he's had any.

Stan – Indeed...

Caroline (*with a knowing look*) – I'll leave you to it...

Another awkward silence.

Victoria – Sorry about her.

Stan – No, no, it's very kind of her.

Victoria – Go ahead, don't be shy. Dig into the sausage.

Stan – Thanks, but... I'm actually vegetarian.

Victoria stares at him wide-eyed.

Victoria – Wait... Are you gay?

Stan – There are straight vegetarians, you know.

Victoria – Not ones who wear dresses, study in San Francisco, and come back in overalls.

Stan – That's why I was confused when your mother insisted I court you.

Victoria – They're even dumber than I thought.

Stan – So, what do we do now?

Victoria – Well, it seems we're not getting engaged anytime soon, as my mother dreamed. Which is probably for the best. All my boyfriends have been dying violent deaths lately. You'd be the fifth in a month! Carlos, Mamadou, Giovanni, and now Karim...

Stan – Sounds like a football team. That's crazy... How did your rainbow coalition of suitors die?

Victoria – Poisoning, electrocution, car accident, scorpion sting... I'm starting to think I'm a femme fatale.

Stan – One more reason for me to keep my distance. But I guess I'll stick around for a while. Your mother wouldn't understand if I left too soon.

Victoria – Let's go to my room and play a board game. Any preferences? Chess, Monopoly, Snakes and Ladders?

Stan – Do you have Scrabble?

They exit. Caroline enters.

Caroline – They've already gone to the bedroom... That's a promising start. I imagine that in the de Coursensac family, when a boy gets a girl pregnant, he has the decency to marry her...

The doorbell rings.

Caroline – That must be the plumber this time. Finally! I'll get it...

She exits and returns with Inspector Sanchez, who is holding a case with a handle.

Caroline – Come this way... Shall I show you where the toilet is?

Sanchez – The toilet? Maybe later... Inspector Sanchez, from the Local Criminal Police.

Caroline – Inspector?

Sanchez – I'm here to ask you a few questions regarding an investigation...

Caroline – I'm so sorry, Inspector... I mistook you for the plumber—it must have been the toolbox. Would you like some coffee?

Sanchez – Thanks, but I never drink coffee while on duty. But if you have whisky instead...

Caroline – Whisky? Of course, Inspector.

Sanchez – No ice, please.

Caroline – I'll bring it right away, Inspector.

She exits. Sanchez takes the opportunity to inspect the room suspiciously.

Sanchez – This petit bourgeois interior doesn't exactly inspire confidence. I'm always wary of the middle class. Statistically, there are far more serial killers among these people than among those paying wealth tax or receiving welfare. Apparently, killing for pleasure is a pastime for those with just enough money for leisure, but not enough to know what to do with it. Now, let's see how their whisky tastes...

Caroline returns with a glass and hands it to him.

Caroline – Here you go, Inspector.

Sanchez – Thank you.

He downs the glass in one gulp and grimaces.

Caroline – Would you like another glass, Inspector?

Sanchez – No, thank you. Maybe I should've gone with the coffee after all. Is your coffee any good?

Caroline – What can I do for you, Inspector?

Sanchez – It's about... a crime, Madam...

Caroline – Oh, you've already heard about Karim?

Sanchez – Karim? No... Who's Karim?

Caroline – Forgive me, it's the emotion. I just blurted out Karim. First name that came to mind. Probably because of the expression...

Sanchez – What expression?

Caroline – “*Karim doesn't pay!*” I mean, “*Crime doesn't pay.*” So, who's dead, Inspector?

Robert enters and catches the last part of the conversation.

Robert – Someone's dead?

Sanchez – Indeed, dear Sir... Or rather, deceased, as we say in police jargon.

Robert – What's the difference?

Sanchez – Let's say *deceased* is more definitive than *dead*. More official, at least.

Caroline – Could you be more precise, Inspector?

Sanchez – Well, here's the thing. While digging the foundations for the new boulevard, the workers discovered a body.

Caroline – A body! Oh my God...

Sanchez – Or, to be precise... a corpse.

Robert – A corpse? You mean a dead body, right?

Caroline – So, a cadaver, in other words.

Sanchez – It's a bit more complicated than that, actually.

Caroline – What on earth are you talking about, Inspector?

Sanchez – Dear Madam, I'm talking about the void left when a deceased person disappears.

Robert – I know exactly what you mean, Inspector, believe me. My mother disappeared recently, and it's true she left a big void behind.

Caroline – So, did you find a corpse or not?

Sanchez – Let's just say... we found an imprint.

Robert – An imprint? How do you find an imprint during excavation work?

Caroline – And how do you deduce it's the imprint of a dead person?

Robert – It doesn't make sense!

Sanchez – In this case, it's a large imprint. Apparently it's that of a woman—a large woman, to be precise.

Caroline – And what makes you think it's a crime?

Sanchez – In my experience, people rarely commit suicide by sinking themselves into a block of concrete—with a screwdriver lodged between their shoulder blades.

Robert – Unbelievable... A corpse in a block of concrete, here in Trouville-la-Rivière. Where is this town heading, Inspector? We're not Chicago!

Caroline – And to think it used to be such a quiet little town...

Robert – I'm starting to wonder if building that boulevard was really such a good idea.

Caroline – And what's the identity of the victim, Inspector?

Sanchez – The Local Forensics Team is working on it, but we don't yet know for certain. That's actually why I'm here.

Caroline – Really?

A pause.

Sanchez – When was the last time you saw your mother, Mr. Blanc?

Robert – She disappeared a few years ago.

Caroline – On Mother's Day, to be precise. My husband had already bought the bouquet, so he gave it to me instead—the only flowers he's ever given me in his life.

Robert – We never found the body. We always assumed it was an accident. Drowning, perhaps...

Caroline – Or a voluntary disappearance.

Robert – Are you saying, Inspector, that... it's my mother you've found? Encased in a block of concrete with a screwdriver in her back?

Sanchez – It's difficult to say at this stage... Let me ask you something.

Caroline – We're more than willing to cooperate with the police, Inspector.

Robert – In our family, collaboration with the police has always been considered a sacred duty. Even in the most troubled periods of our history.

Sanchez – In addition to your mother's disappearance, Mr. Blanc, have you noticed a screwdriver missing from your toolbox?

Robert – That depends. Are we talking about a crosshead screwdriver?

Sanchez – Affirmative.

Robert – Indeed, earlier, when I was putting away the toolbox my wife had given to the plumber – who, by the way, turned out to be the mayor’s son – I noticed a screwdriver was missing. A crosshead screwdriver, to be exact.

Sanchez – Well, sir, I believe I can confirm that crosshead screwdriver served as your mother’s... final rite.

Caroline – Oh my God, how horrible! This is dreadful. My poor mother-in-law...

Sanchez – Did anyone have a reason to bear a grudge against your mother-in-law, madam?

Caroline – Inspector, this is just a family like any other. In this house, everyone feels like killing someone at least once a day. So a mother-in-law... Well, you can imagine.

Robert – Do you have a composite sketch of the victim?

Sanchez – I have something even better, believe me...

He opens his case and takes out a bust, with a screwdriver lodged in the back.

Caroline – What on earth is that?

Sanchez – A mould.

Robert – A mould?

Sanchez – Or rather a casting, as we say in police jargon.

Robert – A casting?

Sanchez – Let’s say we’ve filled the void your mother left behind. Assuming, of course, that it is your mother...

Robert – A casting... Like in Pompeii, you mean?

Sanchez – Except here, it wasn’t lava but concrete that covered the body before it... grannified.

Caroline – You mean *mummified*, I assume.

Sanchez – The forensic team in Trouville-la-Rivière injected plaster into the mould to create this copy. Of course, this one is a miniature.

Caroline – Well, I must say, bravo! It’s very well done, isn’t it, Robert?

Sanchez – Does this... statue seem familiar to you?

Robert – Hard to say... I’ve never seen a bust of my mother before.

Sanchez – No pressure—I understand this is emotional for you. I’ll give you some time to think... And if your memory returns...

Caroline – You mean you’re going to leave this horror with us?

Sanchez – Don’t worry—it’s not the only one. We’ve made several copies for the investigation.

Robert – If it really is Mum, at least we'll have a unique keepsake, don't you think, dear?

Sanchez – No need to see me out, I know the way.

He exits the opposite way he entered. Robert and Caroline stare at the bust in perplexity.

Robert – It does look a lot like my mother, doesn't it?

Caroline – You think so?

Robert – Have you seen? It's remarkable—it looks like she's watching us, like she wants to say something.

Sanchez reappears, returning from the opposite direction.

Sanchez – Pardon me, I believe the exit is this way... By the way, I've noticed something you might find interesting...

Robert – Yes?

Sanchez – You have a leak in your toilet.

He exits.

Robert – There's something... about the nose... Don't you see it?

Caroline – Yes, maybe...

Robert – It's strange... It's as if she's looking at you...

The doorbell rings.

Caroline – Let's hope it's the plumber this time.

Robert places the bust prominently on a piece of furniture and gazes at it.

Robert – Mum, are you trying to tell me something?

Caroline returns with Alexandra de Coursensac (a woman in this adaptation, but could also be a man named Alexandre).

Caroline – Robert? Madame de Coursensac is here.

Robert – Madame Mayor! What a surprise—we weren't expecting you so early.

Alex – Sorry, but I have a few commitments this afternoon. Since I was visiting the new boulevard construction site, I thought I'd drop by to say a quick hello.

Robert – You're very welcome in our modest home, Madam Mayor!

Alex – I hope I'm not disturbing you?

Robert – Not at all! We'd invited you for tea—or perhaps an aperitif, if you prefer.

Caroline – Robert, why don't you get us something to drink?

Alex – That’s very kind, but I have a council meeting in an hour. If I show up with a drink or two in me...

Caroline – Please, have a seat! Surely you have five minutes to spare.

They sit.

Alex – I’ve been meaning to properly meet you for ages. It’s true, we bump into each other at the market now and then—especially during election periods—but we’ve never had the chance to talk. You make pipes, don’t you?

Caroline – Yes, well, it’s mainly my husband.

Robert – The Blanc family has been making pipes in Trouville-la-Rivière, father to son, since 1824.

Alex – Ah, a true family tradition.

Caroline – That’s why our motto is: *Trouville-la-Rivière, where pipes come from.*

Alex – Ah, that’s very clever indeed... My son Stanislas is here, isn’t he?

Caroline – Yes, he’s with my daughter’s bedroom. I think they’re playing Scrabble...

Robert – He studied business, right?

Alex – I always hoped he’d pursue the priesthood... He spoke about it when he was thirteen or fourteen. He was very close to our parish priest—just before that saintly man was abruptly transferred by the diocese.

Robert – One might think of embracing the priesthood, but sometimes it’s just the priest one embraces...

Caroline glares at him.

Caroline – In any case, we’re thrilled that Stanislas and Victoria are getting along so well.

Alex – Yes, so am I. Especially since we don’t often see him with girls... Sometimes we even wonder if he’s a little...

Caroline – Shy. Yes, that was my impression too. When he arrived, I mistook him for the plumber, and he didn’t even dare to correct me.

Robert – By the way, congratulations on the construction of this boulevard, Madame Mayor. We didn’t have one in Trouville-la-Rivière yet.

Alex – Yes, indeed. It was long overdue. A boulevard, you see, is what separates a large village from a small town.

Robert – And as I understand it, since the boulevard will encroach a little on our garden, it’ll also give us a new address?

Caroline – That’s true! I’m curious—what will this prestigious new address be? Have you chosen a name for the boulevard, Madame Mayor?

Alex – Well... My deputy suggested: Boulevard Alexandra de Coursensac.

Caroline – Ah yes, that does have a nice ring to it for a boulevard, doesn't it?

Robert – To have a boulevard named after you, and while you're still alive... I'd be happy with a street.

Caroline – Or even a cul-de-sac: *Robert Blanc Dead End*. That has a nice sound too.

Alex – We're in an election period. A contribution to our campaign fund, and who knows? We might consider naming a cul-de-sac after you—for services rendered to the community, of course.

Robert – You'd do that?

Alex – It all depends on the size of the cheque, naturally. How about an alley or a lane?

Robert – I didn't know we were building new ones in Trouville-la-Rivière.

Alex – We could always rename a small street currently named after a great Resistance fighter. One must move with the times, no?

Robert – And what about a small square? How much would that cost?

Alex – Well...

Robert's mobile rings.

Robert – Excuse me for a moment. Yes? Yes, this is The French Pipe...

Robert exits.

Caroline – I'm not sure if I should mention this now, but... I think my husband is about to make a huge mistake.

Alex – Don't worry. If you're a little short on cash, I can get him a military medal for under €10,000. Which one would you like?

Caroline – No, it's not that. Unfortunately, it's much more serious...

Alex – He's cheating on you?

Caroline – I do suspect him of having an affair with his urologist, who happens to be Asian. But that's not the part of the *yellow peril* that worries me.

Alex – I'm not sure I want to hear this... Why not confess to a priest instead? They love these salacious stories.

Caroline – Robert wants to sell *The French Pipe*!

Alex – No!

Caroline – I even suspect the Chinese might be involved. They're everywhere these days. Buying up our airports, tobacconists, vineyards... But we won't let them take the jewel of our craftsmanship.

Alex – Your patriotism is commendable, Caroline, but what can we do against such forces?

Caroline – I don't know... Maybe notify the police... have him declared unfit, placed under guardianship... He's made a will in my favour, but what if he changes his mind?

Alex – Guardianship isn't so simple, you know.

Caroline – You're right—widowhood is much simpler. Couldn't we ask the secret services to eliminate him for reasons of state, like they've done in the past? After all, this is about protecting France's industrial heritage!

Alex – I'll mention it to the head of the Local Police, I promise.

Caroline – Thank you, Madame Mayor.

Alex (*looking at the bust*) – This is curious... What's this statue? It's watching us, almost like the Mona Lisa. One of your ancestors, perhaps?

Caroline – My mother-in-law...

Alex – Really? It's quite rare to have a bust of one's mother-in-law at home, isn't it?

Caroline – Yes... I dream of having one of my husband too.

Robert returns.

Alex – Ah... We were just talking about you. Your wife mentioned you're thinking of closing your business. That would be a great loss for the community. Trouville-la-Rivière's pipes are renowned worldwide and are a source of pride for our town.

Robert – Sadly, business isn't what it used to be.

Alex – Have you found a buyer?

Robert – Not yet. Handmade pipes don't interest American pension funds, you know...

Alex – Even with new technology, it's hard to sell a family pipe factory as a start-up.

Robert – French-made pipes don't export well. And anything smoked has a bad reputation these days. If you've got any bright ideas to boost sales, I'm all ears.

Alex – I don't know... Maybe a vape shaped like a pipe?

Caroline – Ah, now that's an idea! Don't you think, Robert?

Alex – I really should be going...

Robert – Already? I wanted to show you my private collection.

Alex – A collection of paintings?

Robert – My pipe collection!

Alex – You'll have to show me your pipes another time, dear Mr Blanc. I must dash. I can't keep my local council waiting. But... do think about my little proposal.

Caroline – We'll see you out...

They exit. Stan and Victoria return.

Victoria – So, what do you plan to do now with your business degree? Selling your soul to Big Capital?

Stan – No. I've decided it's time to finally embrace who I really am.

Victoria – Are you coming out?

Stan – I'm going to drama school.

Victoria – Oh wow...

Stan – I wonder how my mother will take it.

Victoria – How did she take it when you told her you were vegetarian?

Stan – I haven't dared to tell her yet.

Victoria – Well, you've convinced me—I'm done with meat forever.

Stan – Slaughterhouses are extermination camps created by humans who claim superiority. Meat eaters are today's Nazis.

Victoria – You're right...

Stan – If you're interested, I'm part of a group that takes action against animal abusers.

Victoria – You mean... violent actions?

Stan – The real violence is what these Nazis inflict on our animal friends.

Victoria – I'll think about it... But I take a broader view of the world's problems. I'm a member of the National Left Front.

Stan – The calves and chickens can't wait, Victoria—they need us.

Victoria – So do the French, Stan. They're like sheep, following dogs out of fear of being eaten by wolves.

Stan – If humans are ever to stop being wolves to one another, we must first end the violence we inflict on animals

Victoria – Hitler was a vegetarian. That doesn't exactly fill me with optimism.

Robert returns with Caroline.

Caroline – Stanislas! Your mother was just here. Don't tell me you're leaving already?

Stan – I'll be back, Madam... If only for a rematch.

Robert – A rematch?

Stan – Your daughter beat me at Scrabble. She's a real pro, you know.

Caroline – Stay for lunch! After the meal, you can talk business with my husband. Man to man. You studied business, and Robert could really use some fresh ideas to revive *The French Pipe*.

Stan – That’s very kind of you, but I wouldn’t want to intrude.

Caroline – Oh, Thursdays are easy—it’s the maid’s day off, so we just have steak tartare for everyone!

Stanislas glances knowingly at Victoria.

Stan – Maybe another time.

Caroline – But I can cook it for you if you don’t like raw meat

Stan – Don’t go to any trouble for me.

Caroline – A salad, then? Surely you eat salad!

Victoria – Mum...

Robert – Well, at least you had fun, right?

Victoria – We talked. Stan convinced me to go vegan. He has a very interesting theory about it—basically, he thinks all meat-eaters are Nazis.

Caroline – Well, that’s... quite a theory..

Victoria – I’ll walk you out...

Stan and Victoria exit.

Robert – I’m starting to think that boy might not be the best influence on our daughter.

Caroline – Did you prefer Karim, then?

Robert – Of course not. We haven’t seen him for a while, anyway.

Caroline – And you won’t see him again, trust me... Did you know Victoria joined the National Left Front?

Robert – Oh, don’t worry, it’ll pass. We all want to change the world when we’re twenty.

Caroline – Not me... I just dreamed of becoming Miss France.

Robert – At least you made it to Miss Trouville-la-Rivière.

Caroline – Are you really set on shutting down the business?

Robert – I even placed an ad in the paper to find a buyer. (*He hands her a newspaper*) Here, have a look.

Caroline (*reading the ad*) – *Selling pipes: a blowing business...* It sucks...

Robert – I see no other way to avoid bankruptcy.

Caroline – If Victoria marries Stanislas... He studied at a prestigious business school in the U.S. He must be looking for work, and he could have ideas to revive *The French Pipe*.

Robert – You think so?

Caroline – Why else would I have arranged this marriage?

Robert – Arranged... It's not settled yet, is it?

Caroline – I don't know why, but I have a good feeling about this marriage.

Robert – Female intuition, no doubt... Right, I'll go see where I can hang this painting.

Robert leaves. Caroline comes face to face with the bust of her mother-in-law.

Caroline – Stop looking at me like that!

She drapes a scarf over the bust. Victoria returns.

Caroline – So, my dear, how did it go?

Victoria – What?

Caroline – With Stanislas! He's so well-mannered, isn't he? And rather handsome too.

Victoria – Yes... But he's gay.

Caroline – I didn't notice. He seemed a bit boring to me, but being cheerful is a good quality in a husband, isn't it?

Victoria – Mum, he's *homo*.

Caroline – What do you mean, *homo*?

Victoria – Gay! He likes boys, understand?

Caroline – Don't get carried away, my dear. I know you're disappointed, but... Nobody's perfect. So, he prefers boys—fine. That doesn't mean he doesn't like girls too, does it?

Victoria gives her mother a look that dashes any hope and exits.

Caroline – Oh my God... The mayor's son... Homosexual...

The doorbell rings. Caroline goes to answer it and returns with Sanchez.

Caroline – I didn't expect to see you again so soon, Inspector. Actually, we're still not completely sure the bust is my mother-in-law.

Sanchez – Alas, dear Madam, the experts have confirmed it. It is indeed your mother-in-law. You seem shaken by this news...

Caroline – No, no, it's just that... I'm still reeling. The husband I had in mind for my daughter turns out to be homosexual. Can you imagine? (*The phone rings.*) Pardon me, I'll be right back... (*Answering the phone.*) Yes... Yes, that's correct... You're welcome... I don't understand—everyone seems to want to buy The French Pipe!

Sanchez – Believe me, dear Madam, the pipe business is smoking hot again.

Caroline – God bless you, Inspector, because in recent years... Apart from a few model wives buying pipes for their husbands at Christmas... (*The doorbell rings.*) Excuse me again, Inspector.

Caroline exits. Sanchez glances at the newspaper.

Sanchez (*reading*) – *Selling pipes: a blowing business.* Well, that sucks...

Alexandra storms in, followed by Caroline.

Alex – This is outrageous! How could you let this happen? And your husband—just moments ago—claiming he wanted to financially support my campaign!

Robert enters.

Robert – Madame Mayor? What's wrong? You seem upset...

Alex – What's wrong? You're asking what's wrong? I've just learned that your daughter is running against me in the local elections! That's what's wrong!

Caroline – Victoria? That's impossible! There must be some mistake...

Alexandra shoves a leaflet under Caroline's nose.

Alex – Here, read this... Victoria Blanc, that's your daughter, isn't it?

Sanchez (*glancing at the leaflet*) – Oh yes, indeed... And with the death of the first four opposition candidates, she's now leading the list!

Caroline – Oh my God, if I had known...

Sanchez (*reading*) – "Against the corruption of the outgoing mayor, Madame de Coursensac, vote for the National Left Front, Anti-Capitalist and Ecological." They certainly cover all bases

Caroline – This can't be true! We explicitly forbade her from getting involved in politics. I don't understand, I assure you.

Alex – And to think, only this morning, you were plotting to marry your wretched daughter to my son Stanislas.

Caroline – But surely these accusations are ridiculous, aren't they, Inspector?

Sanchez reads the leaflet.

Sanchez – "According to the opposition candidate, it seems the *Boulevard de Coursensac* leads nowhere"...

Alex – The opposition... Until now, no one dared oppose the De Coursensac local dynasty. This isn't just opposition—it's rebellion.

Robert – Judging by the string of tragedies among your opponents, it doesn't seem wise to challenge you, dear Madam...

Alex – Are you accusing me of murder now? These are outrageous, slanderous claims, Inspector—crude attempts to smear my name and my family's reputation.

Sanchez – Actually, this boulevard ends at the river where there is no bridge.

Alex – That's absurd! Does a boulevard necessarily have to lead somewhere?

Sanchez – Exactly, Madame Mayor. Must a masterpiece serve a purpose? Of course not! That's what makes it art.

Alex – You've taken the words right out of my mouth, Inspector Sanchez.

Sanchez – Don't worry, Madame Mayor. We'll open a public pointlessness inquiry, and this matter will be swiftly resolved. If every boulevard had to lead somewhere, where would we end up?

Alex – Thank you, Inspector. I trust in the justice of my country! And especially in my local police.

Robert – Still... A boulevard that ends in a river doesn't make sense... Funny, though—it reminds me that this river doesn't have a name either.

Alex – Excuse me?

Robert – The river in Trouville-la-Rivière! It doesn't even have a name! Otherwise, this godforsaken place wouldn't be called Trouville-la-Rivière but Trouville-*something*.

Caroline – That's true, actually. And we don't even know where this river goes.

Alex – Are you going to claim now that this river also leads nowhere?

Sanchez – I've heard of the River of No Return, but the River of No Way Out...

Caroline – Honestly, no one's ever figured out which major river this one is supposed to flow into... To conclude that the river running through Trouville-la-Rivière is just a canal...

Robert – A canal dug by a previous administration led by one of Madame de Coursensac's ancestors, to lend respectability to this impoverished town...

Alex – Come on, Inspector, say something!

Sanchez – This matter is clearly complicated. At this point, I wonder if we shouldn't be calling it a conspiracy.

Alex – A conspiracy to destabilise me, obviously. To prevent another triumph of the De Coursensac family in the local elections. A boulevard with no way out... What nonsense!

Sanchez – When it comes to boulevards, Madame Mayor, if I may, it's this entire comedy that seems to be going nowhere. Do you happen to know the author?

Alex – Frankly, no...

Sanchez – I'll investigate that as well... We can't let such a madman roam free. In the meantime, to inject some life into this story, which is stalling badly, I recommend you take a look at this recent article.

Alexandra looks at the newspaper he hands her.

Alex – *Selling pipes: a blowing business...* What's this? A brothel in Trouville-la-Rivière?

Sanchez – It's true. That's one more thing our big village needed to become a proper small town.

Alex – And you two, a pair of pimps? What do you have to say for yourselves?

Caroline – This is another mystery I can't quite explain, Alexandra...

Alex – Call me *Madame Mayor*, if you please. I want nothing to do with a couple of procurers. A brothel! And on *Boulevard Alexandra de Coursensac*, no less!

Caroline – I'm truly sorry... This must be some kind of misunderstanding...

Alex – You'll be hearing from me, I guarantee it. As for your crude attempts to ensnare my son with your harlot of a daughter, let me be clear: over my dead body will a De Coursensac ever marry a Blanc!

Robert – Allow me to show you out, Madam.

Alexandra exits, followed by Robert.

Sanchez – Your daughter's suitors dying under suspicious circumstances, your mother-in-law found encased in concrete... Don't you think there's something strange going on in Trouville-la-Rivière?

Caroline – Strange? I don't see it... Strange compared to what, Inspector?

Sanchez – We found your fingerprints at the crime scene.

Caroline – My fingerprints? On the screwdriver handle? But I wiped it thoroughly, just like in those crime films!

Sanchez – Not on the screwdriver, dear Madam. (*Showing her a photo*) These prints—your whole hand—were found on the block of concrete while it was still wet.

Caroline – Are you going to arrest me, Inspector?

Sanchez – Don't worry, dear Madam. I've spent enough time in prison myself to know it's no place for a woman like you.

Caroline – You're a gentleman, Inspector. (*Leaning in suggestively*) How can I possibly thank you?

Sanchez – €10,000 in small, unmarked bills, for example.

Caroline (*disappointed*) – Very well...

Sanchez – It's not cheap, of course. But I hear that's about the price of a Legion of Honour Medal on the black market...

Caroline – For a little extra, could you arrange for my husband to pass away... naturally, of course?

Sanchez – Why not? I take on odd jobs outside my hours. I'll prepare an estimate for you.

Caroline – It's always a relief to work with a professional.

Sanchez – I wasn't always a policeman, you know. I'm in rehabilitation.

Caroline – I didn't know the police hired ex-cons.

Sanchez – In the local police, they're not as particular. I hope that doesn't bother you?

Caroline – That depends. What did you do to land in prison?

Sanchez – I was a plumber...

Caroline – That's certainly reason enough to put someone behind bars. But I do have one more favour to ask, Inspector. (*Calling out*) Robert, fetch your tools!

Caroline exits with Sanchez. Victoria returns with Stanislas.

Stan – I think our marriage is officially off the table. Now that my mother knows you're running against her for mayor, the Blancs and the De Coursensacs are worse than the Capulets and Montagues.

Victoria – I see *Romeo and Juliet* still resonates with you... Did you tell your mother you want to pursue acting?

Stan – Yes.

Victoria – And what did she say?

Stan – That she would have preferred I were gay.

Victoria – So, it's not settled yet.

Stan – No...

Victoria – Well, well...

Stan – I wonder how this comedy is going to end.

Victoria – Yes, so do I.

Stan – We should ask the author.

Victoria – But I imagine he didn't dare come to see the performance.

Stan – I think we'd better leave. Hopefully, the people in the audience will figure out it's over.

Victoria – I knew it... This boulevard really was a dead end.

They exit. Music plays. Lights fade to black.

The End

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez was first a drummer for several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then began a career writing television scripts before turning to theatre and writing plays. He has written close to a hundred scripts for television and as many plays, some of which have already become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). He is one of the most produced contemporary playwrights in France and in other francophone countries. Several of his plays are also available in Spanish and English, and are regularly produced in the United States and Latin America.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his website La Comédiathèque (<https://comediatheque.net/>). However, public productions are subject to SACD filing.

Other plays by the same author translated in English

Comedies for 2

EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Preliminaries
Running on empty
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman,
one giant leap backward for
Mankind
The Way of Chance

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
How to get rid of your best
friends
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the
audience?
Just a moment before the end of
the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore
Hall
One marriage out of two
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police
Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more

At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police
Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana
Abbey
Music does not always soothe
the savage beasts
Neighbours'Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Most Beautiful Village in
France
The Performance is not
cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
For real and for fun
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lost time Chronicles
Open Hearts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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